

DPH Announces First Human Case of West Nile Virus Reported in Delaware Since 2018

The Division of Public Health (DPH) announced today that a 69-year-old Kent County man has become infected with West Nile Virus (WNV), the state's first case of human WNV since 2018, when 10 human WNV cases were reported, including two deaths from the illness. An epidemiological investigation is currently ongoing to confirm any travel history or sources that could have led to transmission. To protect the patient's privacy, no more information will be provided on the individual at this time.

"We're sad to learn that a case of West Nile Virus has been reported in Delaware," said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. "West Nile Virus can be very serious and even deadly, particularly in vulnerable populations. Please take all proper precautions when going outdoors and there is a possibility of being bitten by mosquitoes, like wearing insect repellent, especially if you are among a vulnerable population."

The mosquitoes that cause WNV bite primarily from dusk (evening) to dawn (morning). However, other mosquitoes that cause diseases such as chikungunya, dengue fever, and Zika can bite during the day. It is important to protect yourself by wearing insect repellent whenever you go outdoors.

WNV is a mosquito-borne illness that can cause serious health problems. WNV is transmitted by mosquitoes, generally in summer and fall, with a peak period for disease transmissions from mid-August to mid-October. Nearly 80 percent of people infected with WNV will not become ill. While only a little

less than 20 percent of those infected with the virus will develop West Nile fever with mild symptoms (fever, headache, body aches, a skin rash on the chest or back and swollen lymph glands), one in 150 people infected will develop severe infection (West Nile encephalitis or meningitis).

Symptoms of severe WNV infection include headache, high fever, stiff neck, and/or tremors and muscle weakness. The elderly and those with weakened immune systems are most at risk. Anyone who experiences any of these severe symptoms should seek medical help immediately. Symptoms may progress to stupor, disorientation, coma, convulsions, paralysis and possibly death.

Mosquito Bite Prevention

To avoid mosquito bites and reduce the risk of infection, individuals should:

Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for reapplication times.

If using sunscreen, apply it first and insect repellent second.

Adults: Spray insect repellent onto your hands and then apply it to the child's face. Do not apply insect repellent onto a child's hands, eyes, mouth, or on cut or irritated skin.

Do not use insect repellent on babies younger than 2 months of age.

When outside, wear shoes, light-colored long-sleeved shirts and pants. Dress your child in clothing that covers arms and legs. Mosquito netting can protect one's face and neck, and infants in carriages, strollers and playpens.

Use permethrin (an insecticide) to treat clothing and gear (such as boots, pants, socks, and tents), but do not apply to skin.

Prevent mosquitoes from entering the house by using screens and keeping windows and doorways tightly sealed.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's (DNREC) Mosquito Control section announced WNV in sentinel chickens for the first time in 2021 in July. Delawareans are reminded that the possibility of contracting mosquito-transmitted diseases, including WNV and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), will continue until colder autumn temperatures in mid-October or later.

To report suspected cases of human WNV, call the DPH Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at 1-888-295-5156.

For more information about mosquitoes and mosquito-borne illnesses, use the following resources:

For mosquito biology/ecology and control, contact the DNREC Mosquito Control section office in Dover at 302-739-9917.

For requests for mosquito relief in upstate areas from Dover north, contact Mosquito Control's Glasgow field office at 302-836-2555.

For requests for mosquito relief in downstate areas south of Dover, contact Mosquito Control's Milford field office at 302-422-1512.

For animal health questions, contact the Delaware Department of Agriculture's Poultry and Animal Health Section at 302-698-4561.

To report suspected cases of human WNV, call the Division of Public Health Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology toll-free at 1-888-295-5156.

For more information on West Nile virus or Eastern equine encephalitis, visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm.

For more information on what you can do to prevent West Nile Virus, visit the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's website, www.cdc.gov/westnile/prevention/index.html.

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A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

The Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.